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SUBJECT: FY06Q3 PROGRAM EVALUATION: NEW ORLEANS ALL-STARS CAME
MARCHING IN--KUWAITI AUDIENCES EMBRACE JAZZ BAND

REF: 05 KUWAIT 5163

Summary

¶1. The New Orleans All-Star Brass Band made a glorious return visit to Kuwait April 17, 18, and 19, conducting performances and workshops reaching more than 5,600 Kuwaitis. Each of the group's five concerts stressed the unique cultural heritage and resilient spirit of the American people and the beauty of jazz, America's indigenous music. The traditional sounds that originated in the streets and alleys of New Orleans enthralled Kuwaiti youth and adult audiences alike. Embassy offers the strongest recommendation for employment of this outstanding collection of musicians as cultural ambassadors worldwide. End Summary.

A Return Engagement

¶2. Kuwait Public Affairs arranged for the return of the New Orleans All-Star Brass Band for a three-day concert tour based on the overwhelmingly positive reception of their breathtaking Thanksgiving Day performance in Kuwait in November 2005. Public Affairs scheduled the band to engage young Kuwaitis at schools and universities as well as Kuwaiti professionals at public and private venues. Enlisting the support of local sponsors, the Embassy was able to invite the band for an encore visit thanks to the feeling of kinship the people of Kuwait have for the hurricane-stricken U.S. Gulf Coast, to which they pledged more than \$500 million in aid following the destruction of New Orleans wrought by Katrina.

Strength through Diversity

¶3. The New Orleans All-Star Brass Band's visit supported the Embassy's MPP goals to strengthen close ties with allies and friends and to enhance understanding of American society, culture, and values by young Kuwaitis. The eight-member group composed of New Orleans natives focused on exposing young Kuwaitis to the unique cultural diversity and musical heritage of America. Drawing on their varied and dramatic personal experiences and extensive musical expertise, the marching band easily connected with young Kuwaitis, from grade school through university levels, as well as with young professionals and government officials.

High Impact on Islamist Debate

¶4. The jazz band effectively introduced, in a positive way, their unique outlook on American culture, compelling Kuwaiti audiences to look at the U.S. from a new angle. Their presence was particularly timely and constructive as the U.S. role in the region and public music and celebrations in Kuwait are under virulent attack by Islamists. Besieged liberal Kuwaitis, who are on the side of art and music education in this intense dispute, viewed the concert series as bolstering their position. The band's multiple

performances resulted in the appearance of an encouraging op-ed article in Al-Seyassah, a major Kuwaiti newspaper, countering pressures by political Islamists against music and creative expression, especially in the school system. Arabic daily columnist and Kuwait University political science professor, Dr. Shamlan Yousef Al-Issa, wrote under the title "A Special Night": "What I liked most about the band is not so much the beautiful jazz music they played, but rather their success in involving the audience and getting them to interact through clapping and rhythmic movements. For the very first time, the AbdulAziz Hussein Theater was completely full with an audience of Kuwaitis and expatriates, most of whom were young men and women. This means that our youth long to listen to good music and would dance to it if given the chance."

Expanding ACCESS and Public Outreach

¶5. Kuwait's National Council for Culture, Arts, and Letters co-hosted the band's initial performance on April 17. The theater filled with a capacity audience of more than 250 students from remote areas of Kuwait, including AMIDEAST's ACCESS English-language students and music students and teachers from the Kuwait Public Authority for Applied Education and Training. The brass band's 90-minute cultural presentation, introduced by the DCM, was the first exposure to jazz for most of the students. Al-Rai satellite TV interviewed the musicians and guests at the concert and broadcast portions of the show on the evening news, thereby extending the program's reach to the public.

Marching with the Masses

¶6. On the morning of April 18, the jazz ensemble led a workshop for 95 energetic 12- and 13-year-old students at the Universal American School that recently suffered attacks in the press for holding

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musical events. Students enthusiastically queried the musicians about the history of jazz music and the city of New Orleans and expressed their gratitude for the band's awe-inspiring lessons about the United States. That evening, the band delivered an exuberant performance before approximately 4,000 spellbound Kuwaiti guests, adding an authentic touch to the Embassy's colorful, Mardi Gras-themed National Day celebration.

A Rare Phenomenon

¶7. The musicians concluded their tour with a stirring performance at the two-year-old American University of Kuwait. Introduced by former U.S. Fulbright scholar Lisa Erkovich, they played before a spirited audience of between 250-300 college students and their instructors. Clapping, singing along, and clamoring afterwards for autographs, the students clearly were riveted by the unprecedented outdoor musical show. They displayed great interest in the music of New Orleans and the lives of the members of the band, all survivors of Hurricane Katrina. One Kuwaiti student who sang on stage with the troupe exclaimed, "This is the best event we have ever had on campus!"

"Won't You Come Back?"

¶8. The final concert took place at the highly popular Marina Mall, a waterfront venue frequented by large numbers of Kuwaiti youth. Band members readily connected with the audience in a directly inspiring manner, telling their personal stories, involving the audience in the music, and thanking Kuwaitis for their Hurricane Katrina donations to the people of New Orleans. An estimated 1,000 teenagers and adults listened with rapt attention to their passionate rendition of "Down by the Riverside" and other jazz favorites on the shore of the Arabian Gulf. "We hope they will come back again," said a hijab-clad Kuwaiti woman standing with her children. "We don't see things like this often and we really appreciate them coming to Kuwait."

Glowing Public Praise

¶9. Despite attacks in general by Islamists on public music events, the string of stimulating concerts attracted plentiful and upbeat media coverage:

4/18/06

--Al-Rai Satellite TV, midnight news bulletin, 10 minutes

4/19/06

--Al-Anbaa, p. 15, 1/4 page, 2 photos
--Al-Qabas, p.33, 1/8 page, 1 photo
--Al-Seyassah, p. 35, Op-Ed by Dr. Shamlan Al-Issa
--Al-Watan, p. 37, 1/8 page, 1 photo
--Arab Times, p. 25, 1/8 page, 1 photo
--Kuwait Times, p. 3, 1/4 page, 3 photos
-- Kuwait TV covered the Marina Mall concert

4/21/06,

--Al-Rai Al-Aam, p.19, 1/4 page, 2 photos
--Al-Seyassah, p. 19, 1/8 page, 1 photo

Hearty Local Support (Cost-sharing)

¶10. Non-USG Funding: The Embassy organized the concert series in partnership with Kuwait's National Council for Culture, Arts, and Letters and with the sponsorship of several Kuwaiti and American businesses, including Kuwait Airways, Delta Airlines, MTC, Al-Ghanim Industries, The Sultan Center, Marriott Courtyard Hotel, and Hertz.

¶11. USG Support: Public Affairs Kuwait conceived of and arranged all aspects of this cultural program. Post funds contributed to the purchase of giveaways distributed at every event. Embassy thanks R for bringing the group to Kuwait in 2005.

Comment

¶12. Embassy recommends in the strongest terms the New Orleans All-Star Brass Band for consideration by any Public Affairs Section seeking a group of jazz performers. The eight-member brass ensemble is talented, articulate, lively, and charming with audiences. Moreover, they are easy to work with in spite of their geographic dispersal following Hurricane Katrina, and adapted willingly to the Mission's vision and programming objectives. End Comment.

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